

The History of Riverview Amusement Park

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Riverview Amusement Park was located on 3300 North Western Avenue in Chicago, Illinois. The park was bounded on the east by Western Avenue by the Chicago River on the south by the Belmont Avenue out and on the by Lane Tech High School. It included 156 acres of land.

The area where Riverview was located was settled by German immigrants. Riverview was originally a twenty-two acre park named Schuetzen Park by the Germans. Schuetzen Park was a shooting range owned by a wealthy German family, the Schmidts. Wilhelm A. Schmidt and his partner, George Goldman, bought Riverview's land from the Sharpshooter Association, which dissolved. Schmidt and Goldman then ran the park as picnic grounds until 1903. Then Schmidt's son, George, returned from school in Europe. George suggested to his father that they should add rides to the park like some of Europe's parks he had visited. William Johnson, a lawyer, and Joseph McQuade, a banker, helped by supplying more financing in 1904 and Sharpshooters Park became a full-blown amusement park. The new park was named "Riverview Sharpshooters Park." It opened July 2, 1904. The first major rides were the White Flyer roller coaster and the Aero-Stat or otherwise known to Chicagoans as the Strat-0-Stat.

In 1906, the park added 50 acres and 500,000 dollars worth of new attractions. These were Over the Waves, Rollin's Wild Animal Area, Dancing Pavilion, an Igorrote Indian Village from the Philippines, an Ostrich Farm, and a Crocodile Ranch. The

Double Whirl, which started operating in the later half of the 1906 season, had six ferris wheels that moved around the middle post. A new front gate was added in 1907. An automobile race track, the 50,000 dollar Velvet Coaster, the Hellgates, and the Top roller coaster were also added in 1907. Riverview had made a new section of the park called Fairyland in 1907. It was where the famous Shoot-the-Chutes ride was located.

At the back of the park, construction on the Marine Causeway (also known as the River Walk) began. The Pikes Peak Scenic Railway was also built in 1907. One of Riverview's biggest attractions of 1908 season was the Battle of the *Monitor* and *Merrimac*, which was a recreation of the Civil War naval battle. The Aerial 10 Coaster wrapped around the *Merrimac* building and the Royal Gorge Scenic Railway.

The famous 70-horse carousel was put in Fairyland in 1908. It was carved by a group of Swiss-Italian carvers employed by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company. All the expanding of the park enabled the park to expand to 102 acres.

In 1909 the named changed again to Riverview Exposition Park. Three rides were added to the 1909 season. The Tickler, the Witching Waves, and the Expo Whirl were added. Riverview had also put on reenactments of Indian gathering and fights. In 1910, Riverview introduced The Derby, its first racing coaster. The Aerial Coaster was removed for 1911 and another coaster, the first Blue Streak, took its place. Riverview put in a motorcycle race track called The Metrodome in 1911.

In 1913, Riverview Exposition Park was renamed Riverview Park. The following year the Jack Rabbit coaster was added. In 1915, a bicycle race track was added to Riverview. Even though World War I was going on, Riverview added more attractions. In the 1920s, five attractions were added. The park grew to 156 acres in 1920. Riverview

also bought an 180-foot Ferris Wheel. A fun house called Noah's Ark was introduced in 1920. The fun house, Bug House, and sections of the Derby Racer caught on fire in the early 1930s. The foot-long hot dog was introduced by George Schmidt. The Bug House was replaced with Aladdin's Castle. With World War II coming, there was little money for new attractions.

The 1950s saw three rides added. Riverview also added The Hot Rods racing cars in 1954. It took \$175,000 to remodel the Blue Streak coaster in 1959.

Many rides were added in the 1960s. Sadly Riverview closed forever in 1967. Brian Heywood was going to build a Riverview II in Calumet City, Illinois, but the land was not available for purchase. He tried Dolton, Illinois, but could not purchase land there either. Riverview has since been replaced with a shopping center and a police station. The carousel was moved to Six Flags Over Georgia.

Riverview sounded like a fun place to go with your friends. Many generations of children have not gone to Riverview but have been told stories of it and wished to be able to ride one of Riverview's famous coasters. I am one of those children. [From Chicago (Illinois...U.S.A), "Riverview Park," <http://members.tripod.com/n9yap/rivervie.htm>, (Nov. 16, 2002); Gee, Derek, *Laugh Your Troubles Away*; Ravenswood Community History Project, "Riverview Gone But Not Forgotten: A Short History," <http://collaboratory.nunet.net/waters/recreation.htm>, (Nov.15, 2002); Riverview Park, "Riverview Park: Its Role in a Changing Metropolitan Area," <http://www.defunctparks.com/parks/IL/riverview/riverviewpark.htm>, (Nov. 15, 2002); Sharpshooters Productions, Inc., "A Short History of Riverview Park," <http://www.riverviewparkchicago.com/generic>, (Nov. 14,2002); "History-1907,"

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